Forms program earns high rating

BUSINESS TOOLS

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Even though computers were supposed to herald the "paperless office," most businesses still depend on paper — particularly forms — for their transactions.

Computers may not eliminate forms, but they can process them better than old manual methods. One program, FormFiller, can help with preprinted forms.

Using FormFiller you can whip out letter-perfect forms with every entry precisely positioned — all from your computer keyboard. The beauty of such a system is that it can merge data from spreadsheet and data-base programs as well as save any new data.

The first step in using FormFiller is to synchronize your printer and computer by printing a template, or grid, directly on an original copy of your form. FormFiller generates such a template with a couple of keystrokes.

The next step is to construct a "master template" on your computer's screen by entering the coordinates for each field, as indicated on that original form. Form dimensions can range up to 240 rows and 190 columns, though you'll only see 20 rows by 80 columns at any given time.

Also, you can have up to 640 fields spanning double sides or multiple pages. You'll have to make a few runs with this manual process to fine tune the placement of data on a form.

Once you have a master template, you can use these FormFiller features:

■ Printer flexibility. You can use FormFiller on virtually any dot matrix, daisy wheel or laser printer. By embedding printer controls within a document, you can pinpoint the position of each field and change fonts as necessary.

■ Easy movement around a document. Instead of constantly having to direct the cursor to the appropriate field, FormFiller marches you from field to field — after you've pressed tab or enter — in the order you've specified.

■ Built-in math functions. Not only can you import data from spreadsheets, but you can make various fields in a form perform spreadsheet-like math and financial functions. If you were filling in a 1040 tax form, for example, FormFiller could handle most of the tedious calculations involved.

■ Look-up feature. To cut down on errors and repetitive data entry, you can create a small data base for each form that contains often used data like names, shipping addresses or prices. You can then call up the data table to fill in certain fields automatically. You can also have constants appear on every form.

Note, however, that FormFiller addresses just one of the two areas of computerized forms handling — filling in preprinted forms. The other area is designing custom forms. Bloc Publishing offers a companion product, FormTool, that handles custom form design.

I previously reviewed a program called FormWorx that combines both custom design and fill in features for the price of just FormFiller alone: $149.

But in comparing the two, I found FormFiller easier to use than the fill-in mode of FormWorx. While FormWorx suggests you use a commercial forms overlay or a design ruler, FormFiller lets you easily print a template directly on your original using your own computer printer.

■ The bottom line: FormFiller is the best program I've encountered for filling in preprinted forms with a personal computer. It could save your office many hours of retyping time each month. I highly recommend it.

FormFiller is published by Bloc Publishing, 800 S.W. 37th Ave., Suite 765, Coral Gables, Fla. 33134, (305) 445-0903. It costs $149. FormTool costs $95.